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## Hawaii won't forget fallen

### [A Salute to the Fallen](#)

Read the stories of fallen service members with Hawai'i ties, most of whom were killed in Iraq and Afghanistan since the spring of 2003. Follow our coverage of Hawai'i troops and read the [messages](#) from friends and family in [Dispatches](#).



 Photo gallery: [Hawaii soldier remembered](#)

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Advertiser Military Writer

A year ago on their 28th birthday, twins Alexander and Alexis Gagalac were home on O'ahu with friends and family while Alexander was on leave from duty in Iraq.

There was a big party at an aunt's house.

There were trips to Ala Moana Beach Park for bodyboarding and nights spent at clubs.

A year later, family again is gathering for Alexander and Alexis, but it's in somber tones and dressed in black.

Sgt. Alexander Gagalac was killed on Sept. 9 in Iraq, the last Schofield Barracks soldier to lose his life on a 15-month deployment by more than 7,000 Hawai'i soldiers that ended in October.

The Army told the Gagalacs, who live in Salt Lake, that an explosive device that was like a rocket-propelled grenade, but stronger, hit their son's Humvee.

Yesterday, on his birthday, Alexis Gagalac plucked a small American flag from his brother's grave at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl and replaced it with a new one.

"This (old) one is tattered, frayed up," Alexis said.

Coping with Alexander's death is part of the new routine the family must endure.

On Tuesday, the state Legislature will acknowledge the sacrifice made by the Gagalacs and 30 other families who lost military members with Hawai'i ties in combat zones over the past year.

The state Medal of Honor is being awarded for the third year after it was created in 2005.

The special joint session of the Legislature is scheduled for 2 p.m. in the House chambers. Nineteen of the 31 families eligible for the recognition will be present. Some families are coming from as far as New York and Florida.

The names of 67 service members were read aloud last year in a similar recognition.

As of Jan. 31, Hawai'i had lost 217 service members in operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, according to state Rep. K. Mark Takai, D-34th (Newtown, Waiiau, Pearl City), whose office oversees the Medal of Honor effort.

"However, we see the war right now, I think what we all agree on is that these families are going through tremendous pain, and if this is going to help some of them go through that grieving process ... then this is very important," Takai said.



Fabian Gagalac, left, watched as his son, Alexis, placed a new American flag at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific grave of Alexis' twin brother, Sgt. Alexander Udarbe Gagalac, who was killed in Iraq last year. The Gagalac family gathered at Punchbowl yesterday to remember Alexander on what would have been his 29th birthday.

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Behind each of the family representatives who will be at the state Capitol is a story of a continuing struggle with difficult emotions.

Elizabeth Jeffries, whose husband, Petty Officer 1st Class Victor W. Jeffries, was killed in Kuwait on Dec. 30 in a vehicle accident, said the past couple of months have been very hard.

"It's been traumatic for me and my two daughters. It's hard to learn to live without my husband," Elizabeth Jeffries said, struggling to control her emotions.

The Hawai'i Kai woman has daughters ages 17 and 18. Victor Jeffries, a Navy reservist, was a physical education teacher at Farrington High School. He died in a multiple vehicle accident in Kuwait.

Elizabeth Jeffries said she doesn't know how to thank the people of Hawai'i for all the support they've given her family.

"We're very proud of Victor and very thankful for the military and state of Hawai'i for honoring him like this," she said.

At Punchbowl yesterday, about two dozen family members and friends remembered Alexander Galac and prayed for him on his birthday.

Edwin Udarbe, a cousin, left a kukui nut and ti leaf lei on Gaga-lac's grave with a note that said: "Alexander, on this day you came into the world. You blessed our lives, you graced our hearts with love, and you will forever remain with us as a friend, a cousin, a hero, an angel."

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